

November 8, 2012

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554
Re: Public Comment for CC Docket No. 96-128 ("Wright Petition")

Dear Madam Secretary:

My name is Verinda M. Birdsong and I am a Christian columnist, writer and social justice advocate. I implore you to consider the significance of the Wright Petition, CC Docket No. 96-128. Without helping inmates to gain and maintain family connections while incarcerated, the rehabilitative and restorative model of justice in the United States will not be actualized. Without restoring prisoners with rehabilitative programs, including the opportunity to connect or re-connect with family members with regular family contact by providing low-cost phone fees, we may be hindering the process of re-entry back into the community. Many have come from broken families, one of the leading causes why so many persons end up behind bars in the first place.

Even with a good family foundation, many are caught up in the judicial system. I do not think it is right that families already dealing with the non-monetary costs of incarceration should have to decide between taking a collect call and paying a bill. I have experienced, learned and observed that many times, phone calls by inmates to family members, especially during the holidays, helped inmates to cope with the grief of not being around to help family members or raise children; mitigated violence within the institution; and facilitated healing within the family unit.

Incarceration is a necessary outcome for wrongdoers; prison as a punishment for committing crime, protects society and roots out evil within society. However, I believe we must still be a just society while punishment is enacted on behalf of the good of society. We must not become unjust to the prisoner who needs to learn what real justice is – a phone call home can be a type of restorative justice: a way of letting the prisoner know he or she is still human; there is hope, they matter while they understand the seriousness of the consequences that occur when you break the law.

So many inmates are sentenced to prisons far away from home. Many have not or may potentially wait 5, 10, or 20 years without seeing mother, father, spouse, or their children. This is inhumane in my estimation. Regular phone calls to family members can bridge the distance that prohibits family members from visiting their incarcerated loved one bringing some humanity to an already dire family personal, social and economic situation.

I pray that you will hear the voice of God in your decision regarding legislation that will provide, at a low fee, all inmates', including those detained for immigration violations, the right and

opportunity to make a phone call to “identified” family members regularly. Assisting in the maintenance of some semblance of “family” during the incarceration period is critical; while also not abating the necessary security and monitoring of phone calls as a crucial and needed component in any jail or prison system.

I want to affirm my wholehearted belief in the restorative justice that Jesus Christ gives to all those who turn away from a life of sin. I believe with Christ, men and women who are incarcerated can become changed men and women with the help of programs that help them see what they have done wrong, restore back to the community when possible, what was taken and be rightfully re-entered into society as whole men and women after time has been served. This is what my faith teaches: Jesus loves the prisoner. I believe in the family and I believe that those who have committed crimes need opportunities to be restored to wholeness within the family unit which includes natural and adoptive family relationships (spouse, children, mothers, fathers, church, etc.).

No matter what any of us have done, God does love and care about all of us; you, and me and those who are incarcerated and their families. I support this endeavor as a citizen of this country and I want to add my voice, and what God says about family life and the importance of the thousands of men, women and children housed our correctional institutions.

God bless you.

Respectfully submitted,

Verinda M. Birdsong, MPA (electronic signature)

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